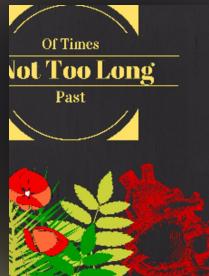




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Of Times Not Too Long Past

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Chapter 1 by Ryan Austin McGrath

I was walking out at my new property, thirty six acres out in the backwoods of Illinois. It wasn't a bad country to look at, that is if you enjoyed the sight of endless corn fields. Either way, I had land. That was the main thing. There wasn't much significant about my property, it had some largely wooded areas, there were two ponds, one much larger than the other, neither any deeper than ten feet. The larger of the two was infested with beavers, however I didn't mind the creatures, the trees they targeted I would have cut down either way. There was one actual structure out there on my land, a large empty pole barn. It needed to be renovated into a liveable home. Whilst walking amidst the needless heaps of industrial garbage, such as oil tanks or large cement pipes, I discovered a small path through the brush into a wooded area.

Naturally I followed it, and it may be one of the most regrettable decisions of my life. The brush was thick with dying grass due to the season, cockaburrs clung to my apparel, and thorns tore at my legs until I reached the tree line. The trees were tall and thin, primarily oak, spaced like any other forest, however there seemed to be less light here. As if the sun could not penetrate the foliage for some obscure reason. I checked to be sure that it had not clouded over, and the sky was clear, the ominous darkness was of the trees, not of the sky. I spotted the discarded, shredded carcass of a tire and walked in that direction. My intuition suggested that by following

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here and there about the wasteland, and amidst the oddities, growing from the plantless grounds, there was a solitary tree. This tree was unlike any other I had yet to lay my eyes upon, it was monstrously thick, twisted, almost gnarled, and the color was darker than the rest. The leaves on this tree were still a deep, full green color, despite the fact that we had already had our first snow of the season. I further examined the massive trunk, and slightly above my head, so roughly six feet up, there was an odd shape grown into the tree. It wasn't at all coherent with the manner in which the rest of the bark grew, it presse out, framed by smooth vein like structures, and formed an upside down, distinctly triangular shape. Upon making note of the odd structure of the tree, I elected to further analyze the surrounding cement structures. For the most part they were all simply blocks, or a series of bricks stacked together, I found a chimney, and some red bricks still mortared together, but the only formation truly of note was a large square of cement, with an empty center, leaving it to appear as some sort of large compartment or planter. I had no way of recording any of my findings, for I had not expected to truly find anything interesting, and thus I had to make careful considerations as to remember all details of the area. There was something about it, some sort of abysmal mystique that left my body feeling empty and sent shivers down my spine. Even a blind man's stomach would have been tied in knots by the place. There was something to it, a distinct unknown, abnormal, almost evil quality, that could only be described as uncanny. I could not remember a time, even in my early years, where I felt so paranoid, where I had been forced into reservation by the very atmosphere of a place. This was, perhaps, one of the most horrid places known to man, and I now found myself the proud owner of the property. On that realization I resolved to log-out the area, sell the trees as lumber or wood for burning. The wretched place would not remain untouched by my hand. I took one last look at the clearing, at the cement graveyard, at the barren grounds, and I went back to my so called home. Walking back, I looked for signs of other paths, trails of any sort, and found nothing. This was a lone place, at least on this edge of the property. The pole barn was on the other side of a grassy area, ridden with piles of gravel and assorted decaying artifacts of times not too long past, and then up a steep incline through tall brush. Once I reached the building, I retrieved my phone from the car. It was regrettable to leave it in the vehicle, but you can't fix stupid. Dialing my phone, I called the only relative in town

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company, and offered to set up a meeting, or survey of the land, or whatever it is required for this nonsense. The payment I'd receive for the wood, was, according to him, rather substantial. Naturally being paid to rid myself of a problem was an ideal situation, so I had no complaints. I wouldn't even have to pay for the survey or machinery. They were paying me. Its a beautiful concept, a shame though that it destroys a primary aspect of the environment. I'd be able to rest easy knowing that the only area I sought to destroy was the unnatural, mysterious woods on my land. Writing this now, I know it was foolish to think I could remove that evil from my lands, but at the time it seemed so rational. Unfortunately this was no problem for a rational mind.

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